

3 "THE
PLOW THAT
BROKE
THE PLAINS"

*A DOCUMENTARY
MUSICAL MOVIE.*



Produced for
U.S. FARM SECURITY ADMINISTRATION,
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

DISTRIBUTED BY
UNITED STATES FILM SERVICE
WASHINGTON, D. C.

THE STORY:

"The Plow That Broke the Plains" is a saga of the land of the Great Plains area of the United States. Dramatized in 10 principal sequences, the film traces the story of the plains country during the last 50 years. This panorama of American history surveys the various movements in the Great Plains area—the passing of the buffalo, the successive invasions of range cattle, the homesteader, and the large-scale wheat farmer. Dramatized, too, are the disastrous dust storms which whip across once fertile acres, carrying away rich top-soil and bringing tragedy to the Great Plains.

THE MUSIC:

Special score on American themes composed by Virgil Thomson, famous young American composer. Musical score played by musicians from the Metropolitan Opera Association and the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, under direction of Alexander Smallens, distinguished American orchestral conductor.

THE TECHNIQUE:

Film depicts story of land with people as background. Land is dramatized; quite the reverse of usual motion-picture technique.

MEN BEHIND THE SCENES:

Pare Lorentz, author and director. Famous movie critic; movie editor of "McCall's" and "Judge." Author of two books, "Private Life of the Movies" and "The Roosevelt Year." *Virgil Thomson* composed "Four Saints in Three Acts" and other works. Served in United States Air Service in World War. Known also as writer and authority on modern music. *Ralph Steiner* and *Paul Strand*, two outstanding still photographers. Steiner has won numerous prizes for still and movie work; made "H₂O", "Granite", and others. Strand, formerly head of cinematographic division of Department of Education of Mexico, where he made an internationally famous movie of peon fisherman. *Leo T. Hurwitz* is a writer and has produced documentary movies of the American scene.

APR 22 1949

THE PICTURE:

Available in 35 mm or 16 mm sound prints. Since the musical score is such an integral part of the picture, no silent prints are available. Running time approximately 24 minutes. Special musical score and brief unobtrusive narration carries story forward rapidly in keeping with superb photography of production.

FILM DISTRIBUTION:

Available through the United States Film Service, Washington, D. C. Theaters or sponsoring organizations must defray transportation charges to and from Washington, D. C.

ACCLAIMED BY CRITICS:

"It is as dramatic as anything could be—the struggle between man and nature * * *. There is something really epic about the film—as epic and American as 'The Covered Wagon.'"

—National Board of Review Magazine in a review selecting "The Plow That Broke the Plains" as an "exceptional photoplay."

"* * * attention-compelling, dramatically vital, photographically exceptional, and altogether worthwhile addition to any cinema program."

—Frank S. Nugent in
New York Sunday Times.

"* * * quite worthy of seeing."

—*New York Herald Tribune.*

"* * * it had diplomats, Congressmen, and New Dealers holding to the edges of their gilt chairs. * * * it packed a terrific punch. * * * it surpassed many a Hollywood epic for sheer drama and technical excellence."

—Frederick C. Othman in
United Press dispatch.

"An amazingly stirring picture. * * *"

—*Washington Herald.*

"It is beautifully wrought, realistic, logical, and historical."

—*Washington Times.*

"* * * it has done a masterful job in producing a movie. * * * the photography is indescribable. It is a series of magnificent scenes, flowing together in continuity sufficient to carry the story. It may have been equaled in other pictures shown in Washington, but it is doubtful if it has been excelled. * * *"

—Bob McCormick, Scripps-Howard
Washington News.

"* * * impresses its audience here with its exceptionally fine photography and superb musical score."

—*St. Louis Star-Times.*

"All through the film the camera work is superb."

—*San Francisco News.*

"* * * the piece impressed the audience as a fine work. The synchronization of music and photography is particularly effective."

—*Chicago Daily News.*

"One of the finest specimens of the documentary film on record, it is a blend of rhythmic prose, inspired photography, thrilling music. * * * There is more serious drama in this truthful record of the soil than in all the 'Covered Wagons' and 'Big Trails' produced by the commercial cinema."

—Donald Kirkley in
The Baltimore Sun.

"Beautifully and excitingly photographed. * * * 'The Plow That Broke the Plains' is a serious and dramatic picture that deserves attention."

—*Philadelphia Inquirer.*

"'The Plow That Broke the Plains' gives with pictorial accuracy and with emotional effectiveness an interesting if synoptical story of what America has done to and with the 400 millions of acres between the Rio Grande and the Canadian Border. * * * Maybe 'The Plow That Broke the Plains' will end up as being a TVA of the celluloid area."

—*Cleveland Plain Dealer.*

"One of the most impressive film epics of a phase of American history particularly pertinent to the present generation as well as gravely important to future generations. * * *"

—*Cincinnati Times-Star.*

“* * * powerful film. * * * amazingly sharp photography.”

—*Minneapolis Star*.

“The results of the efforts of the musicians, the photographers, and the scenarist is a musical documentary film which sets a new standard. * * *”

—*Cincinnati Inquirer*.

“Brilliantly photographed and with a superb musical score. * * * it emerges an immensely emotional, powerful, and important human document.”

—*Cleveland Press*.

“* * * simple to an extreme as far as plot and dialogue are concerned, the film almost choked the throats of the audience when a violent swirling dust storm raged over dry, sun-baked soil even filtering through small cracks in farm shanties.”

—*Hollywood Citizen News*.

“Photography of the picture is almost indescribable in a series of magnificent scenes, for a gripping story in which soil, sun, and wind are the principal actors and with the tragedy of the Middle West dust storms as a climax.”

—*Berkeley (Calif.) Gazette*.

“Containing some of the most superb photography ever seen in a photoplay, the film graphically illustrates how the Grasslands were unwisely turned into wheat fields.”

—*Columbus (Ohio) Citizen*.

“* * * is as engrossing as any motion picture that has been made of his adventures and successes.”

—*Survey Graphic*.

“* * * 2,700 feet of handsome photography.”

—*Time*.

“* * * It also has evoked enthusiastic Hollywood comment. Directors, used to the perfection of commercial films, described it as ‘worthy in every respect to be shown in public theaters along with our product’. * * *”

—*Literary Digest*.

"* * * what the Government has been saying about dust storms in the newspapers was said here in 30 minutes of unforgettable pictures. * * *"

—*The Nation*.

"From standpoint of photography, musical accompaniment, and direction it compares favorably with any short of its type produced in the country."

—*Variety*.

"* * * Pare Lorentz turned in a classic. * * * Demand it at your local theater."

—*Esquire*.

"* * * Not only does it drive its point forcefully and graphically, but it utilizes the motion-picture medium in its purest form; something that pictures made solely for entertainment purposes barely have an opportunity to do. I feel that, in spite of its moderate length, no one who sees this picture can help but be impressed by the broad scope it embraces."

—King Vidor, producer of "Our Daily Bread", director of "The Big Parade", "The Champ", and many others.

"* * * I have also seen a great many documentary films of all nations and regard Mr. Lorentz' by far the best. It has more emotion and drama without the use of human characters than most plays can provide with living beings, because it is based on the truth. In my opinion, the Government would gain its aims for the people with much more surety by releasing this and other such intelligent documentary films for general public education."

—Lewis Milestone, director of "All Quiet on the Western Front", "The Front Page", and many other productions.

